



Reeks, J. (2018). "The churchwardens have not used to meddle with anie seate": seating plans and parochial resistance to Laudianism in 1630s Somerset. *Seventeenth Century*, 33(2), 161-181.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2017.1301830>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):
[10.1080/0268117X.2017.1301830](https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2017.1301830)

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

**‘The churchwardens have not used to meddle with anie seate’: seating plans and
parochial resistance to Laudianism in 1630s Somerset**

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Received 14 February 2017

*Word Count: 11,886 (including front matter, abstract/keywords, acknowledgements, notes,
and bibliography)*

Please note: this is a PRE-PROOF copy of the article.

The final version can be found here:

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0268117X.2017.1301830>

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Abstract

This article considers the impact of the Laudian Reformation upon the spatial organisation of early modern English parish churches, drawing upon the Somerset churchwardens' accounts and court depositions of the 1620s and 1630s. An explosion of scholarly literature on early modern church seating plans and pew disputes has increased our understanding of how early moderns used the parish floor space to represent and reinforce social hierarchies and relationships. This paper investigates the significance of pewing practices to understanding parochial receptions of Laudianism, which required an overhaul of church interiors and which impacted seating arrangements in turn. It proposes that Laudian attempts to enforce a radical restructuring of churches, and to co-opt the churchwardens in pursuit of their policies, ran against established and hotly-defended practices for the organisation of the parochial space.

KEYWORDS: Church of England; laudianism; parish; Beckington; 1630s

The first historian to posit that the 1630s witnessed a clash of religious ideologies, played out from the halls of Lambeth to the vestries of parish churches, was William Prynne in 1646. Prynne was a great historian and, like many a great historian, he had an axe to grind. *Canterburies Doome*, published at the behest of the Long Parliament in 1646, is an invigorating and persuasive blend of original source material and historical interpretation. It comprises nearly six hundred pages of meticulously-referenced and indexed letters, articles, notes, and papers compiled during Laud's trial in 1644, at which Prynne had led the prosecution team. He paid attention to methodological issues, remarking that he had made every effort to procure Laud's own notes "or authentick Coppies of them". He was conscious of the fact that he might be charged with "partiality and unfaithfulnesse" in his use of the evidence. Nonetheless, if Prynne had used his evidence in such a way as to make Laud's "Popish intentions" plain, then that would be "not onely excusable, but justifiable, nea necessary, in a History of this nature, which so much concernes Religion and the publick".¹ *Canterburies Doome* was not an objective account of Laud's life and career, nor was it meant to be. It was the case for the prosecution.

The narrative established by Prynne is quite straightforward.² William Laud rose to the Archbishopric of Canterbury in the 1630s and "intruded himselfe" in matters of Church and State "according to the pleasure of his owne exorbitant will". Binding the parish

churchwardens with an unlawful oath, Laud and his allies sought to “set up Popish superstition and Idolatrie” in the Church of England, most notably by removing communion tables to the east end of churches, enclosing them with rails, and requiring parishioners to receive the sacrament while kneeling before these newly-restored ‘altars’. When objections were raised against these innovations, Laud and his bishops proceeded with severity, “undoing” those who resisted by prosecution and excommunication. To corroborate this claim, Prynne produced an example from his own home county of Somerset, where the churchwardens of Beckington had been made “destitute of all relief” and had suffered a punishment “worse than any imprisonment” for their recalcitrance. Laud’s eventual trial and execution therefore stood as a lesson to all that “the greatest Persecutors breathing...shall themselves be troden down and brought to Judgement in Gods due time”.

Prynne’s basic narrative has mutated but endured. The notion that the 1630s witnessed a widespread clash of religious ideologies has remained convenient for many. For the nineteenth-century ‘Whig’ historians, Laudian ideology was on the wrong side of history. S. R. Gardiner believed that Laud was a man of “intolerance” who had sought to “train up a generation in habits of thought which would have extinguished all desire for political liberty”.³ To J. R. Green, Laud was doing the work of Rome, albeit “unconsciously” at first, and the only obstacle in his way was “the Puritanism of nine-tenths of the English people” upon whom “he made war without mercy”.⁴ More recently, it has found expression in the ‘rise of Arminianism’ thesis which posits that an avant-garde group of clerics, preferred into prime dioceses and livings by Charles I, destabilized the ‘Calvinist consensus’ that had held together the Church of England until Charles’s accession in 1625.⁵ ‘Arminian’ clerics like Laud called into question the Calvinist doctrine of predestination; the sacramental overtones of altarwise communion tables were one expression of Laudians’ anti-predestinarianism.⁶ Opposition to reform can thus be characterised as a defence of predestinarian theology and part of the Calvinist fightback. Peter White has noted the striking similarities between the core elements of this thesis and the works of William Prynne.⁷

However, as Nicholas Tyacke has persuasively argued, there is a risk that historians who have contested the ‘rise of Arminianism’ thesis may have overstated the level of consensus that existed during the 1630s.⁸ This article seeks to reinvestigate Prynne’s basic

presumption, that opposition to Laudianism was essentially ideological in nature, by going to his own back yard of Somerset. It seeks to explain parochial opposition to Laudian altar policies, not to minimise its extent or significance. Religious change needed to be accepted and enacted not just in the Church of England, but in the many thousand churches of England: a single recalcitrant parish could jeopardise all, meaning that issues peculiar to local communities mattered a great deal. Prynne maintained, correctly, that the parish churchwardens had an essential role to play in the implementation of Laudian reforms. The fullest study of ecclesiastical administration in Bath and Wells, the diocese geographically commensurate with the county of Somerset, has concluded that “the authorities were dependent on the churchwardens” in the pursuit of their agenda.⁹ Churchwardens’ canonical responsibilities were wide-ranging, from maintaining the parish fabric to reporting Sabbath-breakers to the Church courts, but the full remit of the churchwardens’ office cannot be found within the Canons alone.¹⁰ Many of their functions varied from parish to parish. One such example is their role in administering the pewing arrangements of parochial communities and, in this matter, churchwardens were customarily accountable to their neighbours rather than to their bishops. This article argues that Laudian reorganisation of church spaces threw long-standing pewing arrangements into disarray. To local elites, who used the churchwardens to administer their own models of spatial organisation, Laudianism thus presented a direct challenge to their authority and status within the parish community.

A considerable amount had been written about the organisation of the parochial space. Scholars agree that early-modern pews reflected the social status of their occupants and that there existed a broad hierarchy of pews to match a broadly hierarchical society. David Underdown, for instance, has referred to seating plans as a “social map”, a guide to the “status system”, and a “weekly reminder of the realities of a changing community”.¹¹ Jeremy Boulton has argued that seating patterns based on dwelling “could have played some part in promoting social contacts between neighbouring households and underlining the existence of common religious behaviour”.¹² Nick Alldridge has emphasised the expression of economic status in church seating, with “richer parishioners who bore the brunt of financing the church fabric...rewarded by being permitted to appropriate much of the wall and floor space with family pews and monuments”.¹³ Meanwhile, some have identified the importance of political hierarchies, with men of otherwise humble means potentially obtaining a prime seat at

church because of their role in civic life. According to Robert Tittler, “seats were clearly being employed as indicators of social standing...and had commonly evolved to use as seats of honour for town officials”.¹⁴ Seating disputes can therefore be seen as symptomatic of a breakdown in communal relations. Susan Amussen thus argues that in pastoral villages and market towns, competition between ambitious gentlemen and yeoman often manifested in disagreements about church seating, which reflected “tension surrounding social position in early modern villages”.¹⁵

The sources we use often determines whether we see church pews as having been for the promotion of unity and good-neighbourliness, or as battlefields where divided parishioners competed for social advantage. Seating plans, which occasionally appear in churchwardens’ accounts, tend to give the impression of the former. Susan Pittman, utilising a seating plan drawn up by the churchwardens of St Andrew’s Church (Calstock, Cornwall) in 1587-8, argued that the plan “encapsulated” parochial society, providing everybody with a sense of place and potentially enhancing devotional feeling and engendering a sense of community.¹⁶ Court records give a rather different impression. Amanda Flather asserts that court cases involving pew disputes prove that “hierarchy was an area of constant contest as neighbours struggled to define and redefine perpetually shifting boundaries of social identity”.¹⁷ Others have downplayed the significance of these disputes altogether. Kevin Dillow believed that the significance afforded them by historians is out of line with their number. He identified a rise in cases between 1580 and the civil war, but suggested that there had never been as many as historians have often implied.¹⁸ Christopher Marsh goes further, describing disputes as exceptional cases of conflict when, generally speaking, “seats in church were conceived as an instrument of peace”.¹⁹ All can agree that pewing arrangements had a function in early modern parish society. This article proposes that Laudianism was blind to such concerns.

One of the first to bring together this disconnected historiography was Catherine Wright, whose extensive doctoral research scrutinised nearly 700 pew disputes across five English jurisdictions between 1550 and 1700. The main aim of her research was to investigate “the *meaning* of conflict over church seating as it erupted [in the parish context]”.²⁰ Her work owes a clear debt to that of Keith Wrightson, who found that simplified social schema, such

as church seating arrangements, strained and then collapsed as a rapidly changing social order “burst through the constraints of traditional classifications”.²¹ Rejecting what she saw as an historiographically-prevalent notion of the “static, formal picture” or early modern social organisation, Wright sought to “use the depositional evidence generated by pew disputes [to give] a unique insight into the ways in which the lower and middling ranks of early modern society perceived the social order”.²² Taking pews to be at once material assets and powerful indicators of social status, her thesis proposed that early modern seating arrangements “encapsulate the complexities of social stratification” in an age of “fundamental transformations of the hierarchies or rural and urban parishes”. To Wright, early modern English society was complex, differentiated, and fractured across multiple axes. Seating plans, therefore, are a reminder that “social relationships in the early modern period were complex and fluid”.²³

If the parochial space was negotiable then it follows that a study of pewing arrangements may cast light on the reception of Laudian policies, which required a wholesale reorganisation of church interiors, at parish level. This paper will analyse the impact of the decision, taken in the 1630s, to enforce the altar-wise orientation and railing in of communion tables.²⁴ The Laudian Reformation amounted to a far wider-reaching transformation of parish interiors than the re-orientation of communion tables alone. It entailed the complete refurbishment of the parish infrastructure and came at tremendous expense. Walls were rebuilt, bells recast, and churchyards refenced. Annual parish expenditure in Somerset nearly doubled between 1632 and 1638, from approximately £15 p.a. to approximately £28 p.a.²⁵ Communion tables and the minister’s pulpit were newly-dressed in fine cloth, silk fringe, and furnished with cushions. Royal coats of arms were erected in the east ends of churches, sculpted versions for the wealthier parishes and ones painted onto large wooden boards elsewhere. A few of the larger parishes were encouraged to purchase organs: “to their intolerable cost”, according to the articles of impeachment levelled against Piers in 1642.²⁶ Nevertheless, the issue of the communion table stands apart for the trouble that it brought upon the Laudian bishops. Not only did the crisis at Beckington threaten to derail the whole programme, but there is evidence that the decision to turn the tables caused a great deal of discontent elsewhere too. The legal right of bishops to enforce altar-wise tables was not without question, which made it the Laudians’ weak spot. Furthermore, against this issue,

there was enough resistance for Prynne and his parliamentary allies to construct a narrative of ideological conflict, which served both to justify their own cause and to de-legitimise their opponents.

Hindle and Wright have previously noted that Laudian altar policies had deep ramifications for parochial communities so profoundly concerned with the ordering of pews.²⁷ However, this article goes one step further in proposing that the Laudians ran into difficulty precisely because they failed to appreciate this fact. The county and diocese of Somerset and Bath and Wells is a particularly suitable testing ground for this hypothesis. First, the Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1632, William Piers, was an enthusiastic ally of Laud's, evidenced by his list of "reasons why the communion table in every church should be sett under the east-window or wall with the ends north and south and railed in", which he produced in 1634.²⁸ Second, the survival rate of the Somerset churchwardens' accounts is very good compared to the rest of England.²⁹ Third, the conflagration at Beckington was a particularly significant test case for the Laudians and has become the default example used by historians to highlight ideological resistance. A re-examination of the evidence around this event allows for a fuller understanding of the relationship between ecclesiastical policy and the social space of the parishes in which it was enacted.

All surviving churchwardens' accounts and Consistory Court deposition books for the 1620s and 1630s Somerset have been consulted, together with hitherto unused material relating to the Beckington dispute which is contained within the Laud Manuscripts at Lambeth Palace Library. Close analysis of pewing arrangements and disputes, in particular at Shepton Mallet and Beckington, allow for further investigation of the "centrality of the role played by the churchwardens and other parish elites" in the determination of local seating practices.³⁰ Following Amanda Flather's suggestion that such men "had the power to define and to enforce the boundaries of belonging", it investigates the challenge to this power presented by Laudianism.³¹ It highlights the contested role of the churchwardens, trapped between their customary obligations to their neighbours and the demands of the diocesan authorities. Studies of poor relief by Keith Wrightson, Steve Hindle and Paul Slack have emphasised the fundamentally participatory character of English local government, or what Slack has termed its "consultative processes". On this model, parish officers "secure the co-operation of the

wider communities in which they lived”, authority is negotiated between parish communities and central government through intermediary officers, and “the parameters of enforcement [are] set by the community itself”.³² Conversely, an enforcement/resistance model of government pervades the scholarship of the post-Reformation Church of England. In the ecclesiastical sphere, policy was *communicated* by the bishops and their agents, the apparitors, in the form of canons and articles. It was *enforced* by the commissions, visitations, and the Church courts. To quote one recent study of ecclesiastical governance, if the bishops can be likened to “officers”, the clergy were their “adjutants”, and the churchwardens their “men in the field”.³³ As the Church of England’s leaders became more interventionist in parish affairs during the 1630s, the contradictions between the churchwardens’ dual roles became strained to breaking point.

The first part of this article will utilise a surviving seating plan from Shepton Mallet, discovered on the first few pages of the seventeenth-century churchwardens’ account book. The churchwardens’ role in managing the parochial space is evaluated and it is established that wardens themselves were not expected to make major decisions regarding the distribution of pews. The second part concerns those sometimes referred to by contemporaries as the ‘substantial parishioners’, the wealthiest members of parish communities who in subsequent years would make up the governing body known as the vestry. It will be argued that these parishioners not only defended their right to a commensurately-prestigious pew, but also expected to have the final word on the seating plan as a whole. The third part of this article will re-examine the Beckington altar dispute of 1634-8 and will demonstrate the importance of the social and spatial contexts of the parish in shaping the reception of religious policy in the 1630s. Taken together, these sections identify the local contexts in which the government’s religious policies of the 1630s had to operate. The Laudians struggled with the implementation of table reforms because parish elites, for nearly a century, had used the churchwardens to oversee their own seating plans. R. A. Houston has recently argued that “the spatial awareness so deeply embedded in [English] cognitive structures”, seen in microcosm with parish pewing arrangements, contrasted sharply with the “person-focussed laws and practices” of the Scots, Welsh, and Irish.³⁴ Laudian bishops, who pitted the churchwardens against their more substantial neighbours, worked squarely against the grain of these ‘cognitive structures’.

The churchwardens and the seating plan

In 1617, the church of St Peter and St Paul in Shepton Mallet, Somerset, purchased a new book in which the churchwardens could write up their yearly accounts.³⁵ Once the annual record had been assembled and verified, new churchwardens would begin the process afresh with little need to reflect on what had passed before. The information entered was not selective.³⁶ Matters of considerable historical interest, such as the purchase of table rails in the 1630s, joined distinctly unremarkable entries for the maintenance of fences and culling of hedgehogs in the pages of the account book.³⁷ The only pre-requisite was that an action had required the receipt or disbursal of money by Shepton Mallet's churchwardens. That this book has survived centuries of damp, rodents, and wartime bombs to now reside in a county archive is a matter of accident rather than design. This makes the first entry into the new account book even more unusual and notable.

The seating plan which occupies the first three pages of this volume was one of the few entries which does not involve the collection or disbursal of money. Moreover, it was intended to act as a guide and tool for all future churchwardens of the parish: its prominent place at the beginning of the book would ensure that all who used the text would be aware of its existence. It identified six locations in the building which would have been clearly known to any parishioner or officer of the church, each location containing a certain number of pews marked with a number. The six locations include two in both the north and south aisles, either on the west or on the east side. The other two locations are simply said to be "on the north side", "within" or "without" the rails. These latter two may have been located in the Quire area, which would have left the south side available for parish officers. They were premium pews which would have afforded their occupants an excellent view of the service and would have been located near the communion table, in a place where every word of the weekly sermon could clearly be heard. For each numbered pew, names inscribed within a box drawn on the page indicated who had the right to sit there during church services. Only the top slice of parish society sat here. One hundred and thirty-nine parishioners are named in the seating plan, representing only about fifteen percent of the congregation.³⁸

Only twenty-one of the inhabitants of these premium seats paid an annual fee for their pewing rights. Towards the end of the 1620s, English churchwardens began to rely on rating systems as a means of raising money for the church. The rate was a more systematic and reliable means of fundraising than reliance on more *ad hoc* systems, such as church-ales, fairs, seat levies, and donations.³⁹ Prior to the introduction of rates a significant proportion of the wardens' budget came from the sale and rental of pews, a charge from which this top stratum of the community were exempt. The churchwardens for 1627, Anthony Allen and Thomas Millard, controlled an income of £15 2s 10d, more than two-thirds of which came from the sale and rental of pews: their list of fee-paying parishioners does not include names from the seating plan of 1617.⁴⁰ By 1633/34, only £1 15s was collected through the sale of seats in the church and £2 16s by the sale of seats in the recently-constructed gallery, representing a mere twelve percent of total income in £30 6s 4d.⁴¹ While the importance of pew-rentals as a means of raising money for the church decreased markedly into the 1630s, it is clear that the seats in the schematic of 1617 served a purpose other than fundraising. Those who occupied them generally did not do so by right of transaction, but because of their status within the community.

These were the wealthier and propertied sorts of the community, at or near the top of the social hierarchy. Many were involved in the affairs of the parish church. The first clue comes from the signatures of five individuals who, together with the rector, signed off the account for 1625: Abraham Cooke, George Milward, William Stayner, Edward Barnard, and John Strowd. Four of the five, entrusted or empowered to oversee the accounting process, had a place in one of these prime locations: Cooke in the south aisle on the west; Stayner and Strowd in the north aisle on the west; and Barnard in the north side within the rails. The fifth, George Milward, was not cited in the plan, but his name does appear in the account for 1627, having paid 5s for the exchange of his seat – an upgrade, one presumes. The key determinant in securing a prized place on Shepton Mallet's seating plan was the same ticket to ensuring a leading role in parish life more generally: property ownership. Ninety of the one hundred and thirty-nine occupied their pews by virtue "of their houses". Thirteen were lifetime leases, although these might be reclassified upon the acquisition of property. This happened with a certain Arthur Whiting, whose entry initially stated that he was entitled to sit in a pew in the

north aisle on the west side “for his life”, an entry which was subsequently amended to clarify that his entitlement rested on a house. A further seventeen parishioners paid a substantial annual rental of 12s 6d for their premium seats, while the remaining spaces were either “within the parish hands” or with owners whose entitlement went recorded or cannot be determined.

The women of Shepton Mallet occupied two sorts of pews either claimed by marriage or, for widows, by right of property. A rank of pews on the west side of the south aisle was designated as seats for women for some time. The appended notes indicate that these pews were linked to property in the parish. Two seats in the second and third pew were designated as “a woman’s seat to Mr Jeffrey Strowdes howse” and as “a womans seat to John Strowde house”.⁴² There appears to have been more flexibility in the way that these pews were assigned, perhaps reflecting the dependence of these women’s claims on relationships to men. An entry relating to one seat in the second pew – that it was “a woman’s seat to Abraham Cooke” – appears to be a later addition, while a note appended to the diagram explains that Cooke had paid the sum of 2s to the wardens for the exchange of this seat. Seats ultimately belonged to the property-owning husband. Widowed property-owners could sit alongside the men of the parish rather than in those designated for female occupancy. Widows Barnard and Picksatt each occupied a place on the east side of the north aisle, joining an otherwise all-male pew, the notes stating that their seats were “for their howses”. A total of six widows resided in such pews, their appearance confirming the fact that property ownership was the key determinant for ownership of a status pew.

The prominent location of the seating plan in the account book indicates that it was intended to be a permanent arrangement. Indeed, the 1617 plan was still being modified as late as April 1656.⁴³ While capturing a snapshot of the social hierarchy-at-prayer, it was flexible enough to incorporate amendments necessitated by marriage, death, and the sale and purchase of property. The diagram bears the marks of these changes, a significant moment in the life of a parishioner, captured with the swift strike of a churchwardens' quill. In all, there appear to have been thirty-five such changes during the lifespan of the diagram. Change was incremental and individual, but the essential structure of the plan always remaining intact. When Edward Bernard bought a new house at Downside, a considerable

property which is now Grade II listed, he was placed in a pew formerly purchased by Robert Bisse. Bisse's name was struck through and Bernard's entry records that he had been afforded the position "for his new house at Downside".⁴⁴ Sons also succeeded fathers. A memorandum appended to the diagram records that upon the death of Thomas Strowd Sr. "Tho. Strowd the sonne of Aime Strowd of this towne widow shall be seated in the third seat on the south side".⁴⁵ The seating plan of Shepton Mallet therefore represents both continuity and change: the change brought about by the passing of time in individual lives combined with the expectation that such changes should never undermine the basic structure of parish society, or its seating arrangements, as a whole.

Shepton Mallet was a large market town with a sizeable population, so what of the remaining parishioners? A growing population placed a considerable burden on parish infrastructure. The construction of a gallery at the west end of the church in 1630 was an expensive means of dealing with the issue, and at £33 6s 8d it consumed two-thirds the total budget for the year, but it did mean that new seats could be constructed without affecting existing arrangements.⁴⁶ Offering a clear sight of the minister and service, the pews there attracted a slight premium. The churchwardens for 1633, Herculis Whittinge and Henry Slade, received nearly double the amount in rentals for gallery seats than they did for seats in the nave, at £2 16s.⁴⁷ Most people, however, sat in three banks of pews in the main body of the church. Unlike the premium seats at the front, these were allocated annually upon payment of a sum of money ranging from about 6d to 1s. Those nearer the east end attracted the higher price, with those further west costing slightly less.⁴⁸ No detailed seating plan was ever drawn up for these cheaper seats. Lists of parishioners and their rough location were created only for the purpose of recording the money owed to the wardens. A more flexible system of annual rentals presumably allowed for a greater degree of annual movement between seats.

The detailed record of Shepton Mallet's seating arrangements highlights several important issues. First, that church pews in the seventeenth-century were a valuable and sought-after commodity, and that there existed a clear distinction between higher- and lower-value seats. Pews located close to the minister and the heart of the action were especially prized. Second, that there was a relationship between the social hierarchy and the hierarchy of the pews. Third, while seating arrangements were not intended to be static, and

while they evolved to keep up with changes in the lives of parishioners, broad structures remained fairly consistent over time. Fourth, that the churchwardens oversaw but did not ultimately control the pewing system. Shepton Mallet had a customary formula, accepted by parish elites, and stuck with it for many years. The churchwardens of Shepton Mallet were expected to oversee the perpetuation of this formula. This raises the question about what would happen if changes to the layout of the parish church, imposed from outside parish communities, made significant alterations to parochial seating arrangements unavoidable. The Laudians, who depended so heavily on the churchwardens to execute their policies, were reliant on the very people who in the eyes of the 'substantial parishioners' were little more than overseers. Could the non-negotiable Laudian Reformation adapt to the social and political contexts of parish churches?

The parish elites and the seating plan

A clear problem with the Shepton plan is that it gives no indication of how decisions were ultimately made, or of the specific criteria for entitlement to a certain pew. The 'unwritten rules' of pew occupancy can be deduced through the observation of specific outcomes, but the underlying discussions and debates were not recorded. By casting the net a little wider, to churchwardens' accounts and to court depositions, it is possible to build up a clearer picture of how the original decisions were reached and by whom. Eric Carlson's research in the Diocese of Ely has concluded that seventeenth-century churchwardens were typically drawn from the ranks of the lower-middle orders.⁴⁹ The situation was the same in Somerset. In the parish of Banwell, extrapolations from a rating list drawn up in 1648 indicate that churchwardens in the 1630s and 1640s typically owned between 12 and 79 acres of land, with most wardens in the 25 to 30-acre range.⁵⁰ As relatively humble members of the parish community, it should be no surprise that churchwardens themselves were not in overall command of parish affairs. However, as they were tasked with overseeing and managing the seating arrangements of the parish, their account books are often the places to which we must turn. Their surviving notes, supported by witness testimony in pew disputes heard at the Consistory Court, reveal the close involvement of powerful groups of parish worthies, who were keen to maintain a tight grip on the seating plan of their parish church.

The first case can be found in Shepton Mallet itself. By the late 1620s, the parish church was struggling to fit Shepton's growing population, evidenced by the decision to construct a gallery in the west end. With floor space at such a premium, careful management and control of the pews was of utmost importance. In 1626, two eminent men of the parish, George and William Strode, had endowed a school, almshouse, and lecture series in the parish. Three years later they sought permission to annex the use of three ranks of pews in the church, to be used by the beneficiaries of their charity. The grant was made in the name of the parson, John Cooth, and the two churchwardens, Thomas Strode and Richard Byrt, and inscribed in the account book on 20 April, 1629.⁵¹ The Strodes were given two seats in the "little south Ile...eyght foote longe, & in a breadth sixe foote" and one seat in the "little north Ile...in length fower foote & in breadth three foote". No doubt one motivation to accept the Strodes' proposal was the edification of these young or poor parishioners, who would be sat away from the general population and closer to the minister during services. The chance to publicly reward two benevolent members of the local community for their investment would also come at no cost to the parish purse, as the new seats were "erected at the p[ro]per coste & charge of the saide George and William Strode".

This was a significant reordering of the parish church. The Strodes, eminent and generous though they were, did not have the ability to unilaterally lay claim to such a large portion of the floor space and nor was it in the gift of the parson and churchwardens. The authority to act came from "the consent of the twelve vestrye men of the whole p[ar]ishe", who "did freely give and grant [the space] to them the said George & William Strode there heires & assignes for ev[er]". Though it was not unusual for a group of leading parishioners to influence the organisation of parish matters in the first half of the seventeenth century, the formal recognition of the vestry as an institutional factor in parish affairs was only a very recent development.⁵² The written text of the agreement bears the signatures of eight men, including the parson and two churchwardens, among whose names we find two members of the Barnard family, Joseph Bythesea, Abraham Cooke, and Anthony Allen. Each of these, as we have seen, were occupants of the church's premium pews. In Shepton Mallet, the seating plan was one mechanism through which the parish elite could represent and perpetuate their

own status and authority, not just through their monopolisation of premium seats but through control over the rest of the church space as well.

Many leading parishioners would also be intimately involved in town or city government and, unsurprisingly, church seating became one way through which civic elites might display publicly their corporate honour and identity. In Axbridge, a leading local centre for the manufacture of cloth located to the north-west of Wells, the town corporation wanted to segregate an area of the church for corporation seating and in 1636 a dispute erupted between parish and town authorities. The wardens' accounts for that year recorded that "questions and differences have risen betweene the churchwardens of this *parishe* and the Mayor, Aldermen and capitall Burgisses of this Burrowe".⁵³ Fortunately, there was enough free space within the church walls to accommodate the corporation's request without displacing other members of the congregation. The notes, however, are suggestive of the fact that other members of the Axbridge flock were unhappy with the corporation's demands. For the "peace and quiet of the Corporation and *parishe*" it was agreed that the Mayor and other officials would build new pews "at their proper coste and charges on a vacant place in the body of the said church", that current office holders would pay 3s 4d for use of these seats and new members admitted pay 6s 8d.⁵⁴ Elsewhere the account books indicate the prominent role that members of Axbridge's corporation played in parochial affairs by the 1630s, for example, the mayor frequently ordered the disbursement of parish money to the wandering poor.⁵⁵ This case highlights the fact that early modern society, while stratified, was divided along a number of different axes. Yet the parish church itself contained only a finite amount of space: this is the context in which the Laudians attempted a wholesale re-organisation of church interiors.

Managing the structure of parish seating was not an easy task during a period of population increase and few parishes were as lucky as Axbridge to have much free space remaining by the 1630s. Those who wished to maintain order and a sense of hierarchy in seating arrangements often struggled to justify their decisions to their fellow parishioners. This can be seen in a case from the small chapel at Lieland, near Stoke-sub-Hamdon in south-east Somerset, where a certain John Glasse found that his four reserved pews could no longer accommodate his growing family. In 1637, the Consistory Court heard that his household,

comprised of three sons, two daughters, servants, and occasional boarders were struggling to contain themselves within their allotted seating.⁵⁶ Indeed, the situation had become so dire that a makeshift seat had had to be fashioned out of a board of wood fastened to the end of his wife's pew. Matters reached crisis point with the seemingly innocuous decision to remove the parish chest from its traditional location in the chancel to the Glasse family's section of the church. When Glasse petitioned for the right to construct new seats in the chancel, his request evidently fell upon deaf ears. The court heard how the "greater parte of the substantiall Inhabitants" were against Glasse's request, on the grounds that "itt wilbe some inconvenience to the Communicants when they come to receave the Communion in the Chancell" and that this area was known to be for the parish youth. The "substantiall inhabitants" of Lieland, faced with an acute problem of overcrowding, denied Glasse extra family seats because it would interfere both with liturgical practice and with overall structure of the current seating plan, which reinforces the sense that church seating arrangements were the subject of careful management by parish leaders who wanted to organise parish interiors on their own terms.

The construction of new seats might solve one problem only to create another. Overcrowding might be eased only to see certain parishioners incensed at their being forced to move places, resentful of being required to pay a pew-rent, or worried about the relative status of their new seats. This is highlighted in a case from Creech St Michael, heard before the Consistory Court in December 1634.⁵⁷ According to Richard Burssie, a former churchwarden of Creech and a witness in this case, there was an "ancient" seat in the north end of the church which had always belonged to the owners of five "ancient tenements" within the parish bounds. According to another witness, John Pole, a make-shift seat had been constructed in 1633 by nailing a board between the ancient pew and a nearby archway and a certain Francis Crosse, wife of tenement-owner John Crosse, began to occupy the space despite the fact that Robert Crosse already claimed a seat in the pew by right of John's property. Francis claimed that this space had previously been a place where a child was able to sit or stand, but the other occupiers of the pew begged to differ, and with the construction of five "new handsome seates" around Michaelmas 1634 saw an opportunity to force Francis to move. Richard Burssie testified that John Crosse would certainly have had the opportunity to purchase one of these new seats if he had so desired and both Burssie and Pole claimed

that the new seats were in a perfectly respectable location, standing as close and convenient to the minister's pew as the ancient pew. That this dispute resulted in court is clear indication that John and Francis Crosse disagreed with Burssie and Pole's assessment, but for the owners of the four other "ancient tenements" of Creech the existence of Francis's makeshift squat was an embarrassment that directly challenged the status of their own seats.

Pewing arrangements were further complicated by the introduction of new liturgical practices in the 1630s, which required the removal of communion tables to the east end of chancels. Rails were to be set around them and communicants were to receive the sacrament while kneeling at the rails. Since proximity to the table was a key determinant of a seat's value, moving the table effectively inverted the traditional hierarchy of pews and "intruded upon local customs".⁵⁸ An example from the Wells demonstrates how this worked in practice. In the parish of St Cuthbert, parishioners responded to the movement of the table by reaching an agreement, "by generall consent", that "the seates in the sayd Church of Wells should be made in a new uniforme manner for...decencie and conveniencie". In response, Piers "approved thereof and commanded itt to be done", and suggested that to cover costs parishioners should pay the churchwardens five shillings in return for the continued use of their seat.⁵⁹ The process was far from smooth, however, and ultimately resulted in a case heard at the bishop's court across town. The restructuring of St Cuthbert's entailed turning an area designated for leading men of the parish into women's pews. One deponent, Mary Kelwaie, explained that five men who had customarily sat in the centre of the nave, near the table before it had been moved, had decided that their space "should be converted into severall places or rooms for their wives & that thence forth itt should be a seat or pew for women". Another witness complained that this pew "not used by women, for all the time of this deponents remembrance". Observations about the disputed pew's orientation make clear that, where previously it had been facing inwards towards the centre of the church, now it had been altered to face the east. The witness remarked that previously "there was noe seate in the Church of Wells aforesaid that stode north & south...but there were two seates that stode east & west". Where once the leading men of the parish had gathered around the table in the centre of the nave, the changes meant that their once prime seats had become duds. They quickly faced a strong challenge from the women of the parish, whom they hoped to displace, and who were fortified by an appeal to custom and tradition.

Parish elites clearly thought that they had a right to determine the church seating arrangements and the churchwardens, usually drawn from among the middling ranks, were susceptible to pressure from their socially- and economically-superior neighbours. As pewing practices came under increasing scrutiny through the 1630s, it therefore comes as no surprise to find instances of tension and conflict between churchwardens and leading parishioners. One deponent in the pew dispute from Creech recalled that in all the time he could remember, “the churchwardens of the *said parishe* & *parishe church* of Creech...have not used to meddle or have to doe with anie seate or place in anie antient seate in the church” appertaining to any ancient tenement within the parish bounds.⁶⁰ In Minehead St Martin, the churchwardens’ account for 1637 contains details of an order by “moste of the sufficientest” of the parish that “the churchwardens for the tyme being shall not without the Consent of the moste part of the parishioners remove anie person from one seate to another”.⁶¹ We also recall the case from Axbridge, in which “questions and differences have risen betweene the churchwardens of this *parishe* and the Mayor, Aldermen and capitall Burgisses of this Burrowe”.⁶² The ‘substantial parishioners’ of Somerset’s churches were deeply concerned with management of church space, the ordering of which represented their own place at the top of the parochial hierarchy. Time and again, they proved their willingness to assert their power of control of this space and, quite frequently, they proved their effectiveness in so doing.

Pew politics: The Beckington controversy

Attempts by William Laud and his supporters to enforce changes to the layout of communion tables were highly controversial for a range of reasons, not least because what Laud wanted for tables resembled in form the *status quo ante* protestant reformation. For Laud himself this was simply a matter of “decency” and “order”, but to his opponents, suspicion abounded that what the Archbishop ultimately wanted was to return the Church of England to a communion with the Church of Rome. When the programme met with resistance in Beckington, the consequences would reach far beyond than the parish bounds. The battle to move the table in Beckington spanned four years and threatened to derail the whole Laudian

agenda. Beginning in 1634, when William Piers ordered the removal of the table to the east end of the chancel, it did not conclude until 1638, when the churchwardens, James Wheeler and John Fry, were forced to make a formal submission and do penance for refusing to carry out the order.⁶³ Piers himself believed that the trouble at Beckington was an extremely serious matter, writing in January 1635 to Sir John Lambe, Dean of the Arches, that “if these men have their wils...then many of the Parishes which have already conformed themselves to the Cathedrall will fall back, and other Parishes will never come on to this conformity”.⁶⁴ Without explicit canonical authorisation for the reform of communion tables – which would not come until 1640 – defeat for the Laudians at Beckington could have spelt defeat across the whole country.

The dispute quickly became enveloped in a wider ideological struggle, and this is how it has usually been characterised by historians. One historian of early-modern Somerset, T. G. Barnes, has called it “the most serious puritan reaction to Bishop Pierce’s Laudianism” in a parish where the bishop had awakened a “spirit of naked resistance”.⁶⁵ For David Underdown, the death of one of the Beckington churchwardens in prison added “one more to the number of puritan martyrs”, and Beckington itself he described as a “nest of puritans”.⁶⁶ Ecclesiastical historians of Bath and Wells have been a little more circumspect, but have agreed that it represented wider resistance to Laudian reform of the Church. Phyllis Hembry has argued that Piers was “resisted in many parishes, notably in Beckington, where his authority was flouted for many years”, while Margaret Stieg has portrayed the clash as the most serious of a number of instances where churchwardens had resisted episcopal demands, highlighting resentment at the interference of higher officials in parish affairs.⁶⁷ The Beckington dispute has provided rich pickings for historians of the early-Stuart Church keen to highlight the innovative and destabilising character of Laudianism, and the fierce local resistance that it provoked.⁶⁸ Others have found cause to downplay its significance. Kevin Sharpe highlighted the significant cost of the reforms at Beckington due to the recent restructuring of the chancel there, and posited that the case became so explosive precisely because it became “a contest of will and power”.⁶⁹ Julian Davies calls it an “exceptional trouble” which Piers “exacerbated by his determination to make an example of the parish”.⁷⁰ This article has highlighted the political dimension to church seating: here it will be shown that these complex and occasionally fraught environments were the contexts in which Laudian policy was forced to

operate. Principled and ideological language, drawing upon theological and legal arguments, were piled onto pre-existing tensions and personal grudges at Beckington. The evidence is also suggestive that disputes about church seating played a significant role in making Beckington the epicentre of resistance to Laudianism.

In Beckington, Piers hoped that he could rely on the persuasive capabilities of his ally, the rector of the parish Alexander Huish, to push through a change in the layout of the communion table. Huish was a poor choice as the primary advocate for this or any other cause. He had been the personal choice of the then-bishop of Bath and Wells William Laud, who had specifically requested that the patron of the Beckington benefice, John Webb, appoint him when the living fell vacant in 1627. On 21 December 1635, Huish “put forward his personal conviction of the convenience, decency and reverence entailed in repositioning the communion table at the east end of the chancel”, and was met with resistance from the churchwardens, James Wheeler and John Fry.⁷¹ Piers’s hope that Huish could be a useful advocate was wishful thinking. Huish and Wheeler had a fractious personal history, the pair having appeared in court earlier in the year in a disagreement about a small sum of money.⁷² Furthermore, the appointment of Huish at Beckington in 1634 had been a controversial one locally, with one deponent stating that “it was imagined & repoorted in Beckington...that he should not be *parson* there”.⁷³ With animosity between Wheeler and Huish fresh in their memories, it is clear that for the rector – and, by extension, the bishop – the churchwardens would not be reliable allies in the drive for reform.

However, as we have seen in the discussion about seating arrangements, churchwardens were rarely wielded a great deal of personal influence and power. Though their support, or at least acquiescence, was often critical, other forces often lay behind their decisions and actions. At Beckington, Piers believed that Wheeler and Fry were not the real enemy, but that they were “encouraged and back’d by divers of the parish, not so well affected to the rites and government of the Church as they should be”.⁷⁴ The driving force behind the resistance to Piers’s and Laud’s reform program was the local clothing magnate John Ashe, later a member of both the Short and Long Parliament. At Laud’s trial, he accused the archbishop of having had designs to make him “his instrument about the Rails”, to which Laud later remarked that he had known Ashe ‘too well’ to have ever had such desires: “His

Zeal would have set the Rails on fire, as soon as ever he had come near them”.⁷⁵ That Ashe was an ideological opponent of Huish, Piers, and Laud is not in question, his involvement in the case giving it a highly political edge.

Following the churchwardens’ refusal to obey the first order to reposition the table, delivered at the Bishop’s Court at Wells in June 1635, they were excommunicated. They appealed to the Court of Arches in London, the cost of which was borne by Ashe. Their case rested on two key pillars. First, they noted the absence of a royal injunction, canon, statute, or visitation article to which they WERE bound by oath. Second, they launched a conservative appeal against “innovation” on a matter to which “orthodox Bishops...in King Edward’s time have either written or preached about” and which “Bishops and eminent Divines in Queen Marie’s time have sealed...with their blood”.⁷⁶ Both pillars drew heavily upon arguments already common among Laud’s opponents at the time of the appeal, and indeed, both can be found several years later in the writings of another well-known Somerset puritan pamphleteer, William Prynne.⁷⁷ They were also the basis of the case made against Piers at his 1642 impeachment, that as Bishop of Bath and Wells he had introduced new rites and ceremonies to the parishes of his see which were “inventions of his own...tending to popery and superstition”.⁷⁸ Upon such arguments was the legacy of Beckington dispute secured in puritan popular memory, with the churchwardens of that parish remembered by Prynne in his 1646 *Canterburies Doome* as protestant martyrs, “destitute of all relief” in excommunication, victims of Piers’s bloody-minded and tyrannical determination to ruin them, and suffering a humiliating public penance for their disobedience, “worse than any imprisonment”.⁷⁹

When in 1634 Piers drew up a list of “reasons why the communion in every church should be sett close to the east-window or wall, with the ends north and south and railed in”, his main purpose was to question the decency of seating arrangements which allowed “the People [to] sit above Gods Table”. Aware of the chronic problems faced by many parishes in seating a growing population, he claimed that the reforms would allow “more room for the Communicants”, and that the new orientation would make the face of the minister visible to more parishioners “and his voice more audibly and distinctly heard”.⁸⁰ The force of these arguments, it was later claimed by Peter Heylyn, were the key reasons for Piers having

secured the table reforms in 140 out of 469 parishes of the Bath and Wells diocese by Christmas 1635.⁸¹ These arguments could be reversed, of course, and form a powerful case for the *status quo*. In 1633, the parishioners of Beckington had invested heavily in a refurbishment of their chancel which saw the installation of new pavement to raise the table by about one foot above the chancel floor, the erection of a “fair Wainscot border” around it, and the fitting of new seats both around and above the table itself.⁸² Kevin Sharpe has previously drawn attention to the high financial cost of such a redecoration, but it also stands to reason that agreement about the parish’s seating plan must have been reached in the years running up to this event.⁸³ Chancel seats, likely those belonging to the wealthiest parishioners, had been literally set in stone with this new arrangement. Piers’s order of 1635 to reorient the table also directed the churchwardens to “pull down the said seats” then causing an obstruction. The demand was therefore about much more than moving the table; it was a *de facto* instruction to devise an entirely new seating plan for the parishioners of Beckington.

Between the churchwardens’ excommunication and the subsequent appeal to the Court of Arches, a petition signed by one hundred Beckington parishioners was presented to Laud. No mention was made of canonical or statute law, or of concerns about the encroachment of Arminianism in England. Rather, it was simply claimed that the table had stood in its present position in the “remembrance of any of our parishioners now living”, that its position was “convenient and decent”, and that the signatories prayed for it to “continue freed from all Innovations”.⁸⁴ To understand why so many inhabitants would add their name to a plea for the chancel layout to remain unaltered, three reasonable hypotheses may be proposed. First, that they were pressured into signing by Ashe and his supporters, something for which there is no evidence. Second, that they were ideologically motivated to do so, which would be a surprise given the petition’s striking omission of such concerns. Third, that they were concerned about the impact a rearrangement would have on their own seat in church and, thus, the message that would send about their place in the Beckington social hierarchy. The truth may involve a combination of these factors, but the key point remains: William Piers had demanded a wholesale restructuring of the seating plan just one year after the parishioners had agreed on it themselves.

Contained within Laud's papers in the archive at Lambeth Palace is an undated list of reasons "for our refusal to remove the Communion table from the place it nowe standeth" put forward by the churchwardens of Beckington. Of the fourteen points raised, none deal with the practical issues associated with moving the communion table and the knock-on impact on seating arrangements. Instead, the points focus on the absence of a statute, canon, article, or injunction; an appeal against innovations in "religion soe longe happilie established"; and a powerful appeal to the legacy of the Marian martyrs who "have sealed...wt their blood" opposition to 'Alters'.⁸⁵ It should come as no surprise that the churchwardens, a proxy for Ashe and other puritan interests, would not have wanted to present their case as the particularist grumblings of a jilted parochial elite. There may be more truth in the account of Alexander Huish, whose extensive report on the state of the chancel made its way from Beckington to London in December 1635.⁸⁶ He described a chancel which was overcrowded and disordered. This is perhaps rather predictable, given his desire to ensure swift reorganisation, and his statement that he had seen "disorder in [the parishioners] riding over one anothers backs" seems to contain a touch of hyperbole designed to persuade Laud of the "undecencie" and "irreverence" of the present situation. However, Huish was also keen to point out that one benefit of chancel reorganisation would be the fact that "all the residue of the chancell would be for the Parishioners that want seats in the church, to sit in: wch is there very much wanting".⁸⁷ The result of altar reform at Beckington would be extra seating in an area of the church reserved for the parochial elites, or, to put it more forcefully, those presently deemed insignificant enough to claim a reserved pew would be able to sit alongside those deemed substantial enough to claim the prime seats. Given what we know about parish elites' attempts to maintain total control over the ordering of church space, it is small wonder that opposition to Laudianism found traction in Beckington.

The characterisation of the Beckington dispute as an orthodox Calvinist reaction to Arminian provocations is seductive because Prynne's interpretation, seen in the light of the events of 1642-1646, is a plausible and persuasive explanatory narrative for the civil war. That is the function *Canterburies Doome* was intended to serve. It is true enough that the Beckington dispute was a response to 'Arminianism', real or perceived, simply because this was how Prynne and Ashe understood and marketed it. The evidence, imperfect and imprecise though it is, nonetheless hints at peculiar and local concerns which fuelled the

dispute. With the rector already on board, Piers needed the acquiescence of the churchwardens, if not their committed support, and the acceptance of the substantial parishioners. He had neither.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would offer a couple of broader points about the significance of this research. The first concerns the nature of 'community' in early modern society, specifically, the parish community. In a general sense, agreement has been made with those historians who have pointed out that church seating plans were idealistic representations of social hierarchies and structures. It has, however, challenged the notion that such definitions were organic. The 'parish community' was not an autonomous decision-making agent. Seating plans were conceived by powerful groups of 'substantial parishioners' meeting privately, the same people that would one day call themselves the 'vestrymen'. It was their vision of the social structure that came to be represented in the organisation of the parish seats and the churchwardens can - at best - be seen the executors and administrators of their will. While other parishioners could attempt to 'negotiate' their seats through the courts, the right of the 'substantiallest' to have the final say was always fiercely defended.

Second, this paper has supported the views of those, such as Catherine Wright and Steve Hindle, who have proposed that Laudian policies can be seen as external intrusions into local practices which had developed over the course of the better part of a century. The parochial context is a crucial factor in understanding the impact that national policy could have at a local level. Pews were more than simply a piece of church furniture. To those who sat in them pews represented a piece of personal property and a stake in the local community, to some a marker of their wealth, political status and property, to others a fragment of one's own identity and lineage. The Laudian reform programme, which re-shaped parish interiors according to a wholly different set of precepts, was blind to such concerns. The 'parish context' was more than a passive canvas on which Laud's intrusions were daubed: it was the inescapable context in which Laud and his allies had to work. If puritan ideologues were the only parties troubled by Laudian altar policies, it may not have proven so difficult to implement. Far more serious was the railroading of carefully-negotiated and delicately-

managed church seating plans, which also required pressure to be placed on the churchwardens who administered them. Rather than representing merely the most serious example of puritan reaction, Beckington tested the limits of the Laudians' tolerance for local sensitivities and, faced with a choice between negotiation and conquest, they opted for the latter.

Acknowledgements

Parts of this article were given as a paper at the 'Sharing Space in the Early Modern World' conference, held at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities in June 2016. I would like to thank the delegates at this conference for their constructive and helpful suggestions. Professor Ronald Hutton and Dr Evan Jones have read parts of this article and I am grateful for their critical insights. I would especially like to thank Professor Kenneth Fincham, who served as External Examiner for my PhD thesis. His insights and observations helped to make that work, and this, significantly better. I am wholly responsible for any errors and omissions in this article.

Notes

¹ William Prynne, *Canterburies Doome, Or, The First Part of the Compleat History of the Commitment, Charge, Tryall, Condemnation, Execution of William Laud...* London, 1646, 4-5.

² *Ibid.*, 16-17, 96-100.

³ Gardiner, *History*, vol. II, 99-101.

⁴ Green, *History*, vol. III, 158.

⁵ For the 'rise of Arminianism' thesis see: Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, esp. 185-7; Tyacke, *Anglican Attitudes*, 144-50; Fincham and Lake, *Ecclesiastical Policies*, 37, 48; Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, 2 vols., vol. 1. Woodbridge: Church of England Record Society, 1998, xxiii.

⁶ Tyacke, *Anglican Attitudes*, 144.

⁷ White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, 5-6.

⁸ Tyacke, *Anglican Attitudes*, 140.

⁹ Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory*, 291.

¹⁰ Church of England, *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical...* London, 1604.

¹¹ Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, 29, 31-32.

¹² Boulton, *Neighbourhood and Society*, 286-7.

¹³ Alldridge, *Loyalty and Identity*, 91.

¹⁴ Tittler, *Seats of Power*, 222.

¹⁵ Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, 140-2.

¹⁶ Pittman, *Social Structure*, 26.

¹⁷ Flather, *Politics of Place*, 54.

¹⁸ Dillow, *Pew Disputes*, 192.

¹⁹ Marsh, *View from the Pew*, 81-2.

²⁰ Wright, *Spatial Ordering*, 40-3.

²¹ Quoted in Wright, *Spatial Ordering*, 8.

²² Wright, *Spatial Ordering*, 8-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 37-8, 315.

- ²⁴ See also: Fincham, *Restoration of the Altars*, 919-940; Fincham and Tyacke, *Altars Restored*, 176-273; Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, esp. 205-250; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 188-209; Parry, *Glory, Laud and Honour*, 87-112; Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, 333-345.
- ²⁵ Reeks, *Parish Religion*, 58.
- ²⁶ *Articles of Accusation and Impeachment of the House of Commons, and all the Commons of England against William Pierce, Doctor of Divinitie and Bishop of Bath and Wells*. London, 1642. 5-6.
- ²⁷ Hindle, *Sense of Place*, 106; Wright, *Spatial Ordering*, 187, 218-9.
- ²⁸ Peake, *Somerset Clergy*, 203.
- ²⁹ See Hutton, *Rise and Fall*, App. 1, 263-93.
- ³⁰ Wright, *Spatial Ordering*, 265.
- ³¹ Flather, *Gender and Space*, 147.
- ³² Wrightson, *Politics of the Parish*, 10-46; Hindle, *State and Social Change*, 174, 201; Slack, *English Poor Law*, 13; Healey, *Contested Relief*, 131-56. Hindle, *On the Parish*, 361-449.
- ³³ Boyd de Leon Thomson, *Diocese of Winchester*, 113.
- ³⁴ Houston, *People, Space, and Law*, 49-52.
- ³⁵ Taunton, Somerset Heritage Centre [hereafter SHC], Churchwardens' Accounts [hereafter CWA] of Shepton Mallet, 1617-1704, D\P\she/4/1/1.
- ³⁶ This is in contrast to the wardens' account of pre-Reformation England. See Burgess, *Pre-Reformation Churchwardens' Accounts*, 306-332; Kümin, *Late Medieval Churchwardens' Accounts*, 87-99; Hutton, *Seasonal Festivity*, 66-79.
- ³⁷ Though historians are able to do remarkably innovative things with the mundane as well as the exciting information: see for example Webb, *Vermin*, 143-156.
- ³⁸ CWA Shepton Mallet, 32. 1107 parishioners paid a total of £9 14s 6d to the churchwardens for 1634, John Pew and Benjamin Tire, for receiving communion in the year.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 28, 32. The first rate in Shepton Mallet was levied in 1633, bringing in £16 3s or about half the total budget for that year.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-20.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 3.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39-43.
- ⁴⁹ Carlson, *Origins*, 196-7.
- ⁵⁰ Taunton, SHC, CWA Banwell, D/P/ban 4/1/1. The rating list for 1648 can be found on pages 99-103. In Banwell, the parish rate was calculated according to the number of acres of land owned by each rated individual. The further we move forward or back in time the less reliable the extrapolation becomes, however, the figures for the six churchwardens who served between 1647 and 1649 are as follows: Richard Kencott (32 acres); Edmond Sayer (30 acres); Thomas Barkwell (12 acres); John Sheppard (28 acres); John Sheppard (17 acres); John Knight (24 acres).
- ⁵¹ CWA Shepton Mallet, 24.
- ⁵² Merritt, *Early Modern Westminster*, 105-113.
- ⁵³ Taunton, SHC, CWA Axbridge, D/P/ax 4/1/1, unfol., 1636.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, unfol., 1636.
- ⁵⁵ For example, the 6d churchwardens were ordered to disburse to a 'poore woman' on her way through the town in 1635. CWA Axbridge, D/P/ax 4/1/1, unfol., 1635.
- ⁵⁶ Taunton, SHC, Deposition Books of the Consistory Court [hereafter DBCC], *Glasse Contra Baker et Rossiter*, 24 October 1637, D\D/cd/72 (1637), unfol.
- ⁵⁷ Taunton, SHC, DBCC, *White et al Contra Crosse*, 3 December 1634, D\D/cd/71 (1631-1635), unfol.
- ⁵⁸ Wright, *Spatial Ordering*, 218-9.
- ⁵⁹ Taunton, SHC, DBCC, D\D/cd/83 (1636), *Ex pte Elizabeth Cornishe*, 4 January 1636/7, unfol.
- ⁶⁰ Taunton, SHC, DBCC, D\D/cd/71 (1631-1635), *White et al. Contra Crosse*, 3 December 1634, unfol.
- ⁶¹ Taunton, SHC, CWA Minehead St Martin, D/P/m.st.m 4/1/1, unfol., 1637.
- ⁶² Taunton, SHC, CWA Axbridge, D/P/ax 4/1/1, unfol., 1636.

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- ⁶³ John Rushworth, *Historical Collections: 1635*. In *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State: Volume 2, 1629-38*. London, 1721, 287-318, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rushworth-papers/vol2/pp287-318> [accessed 29 December 2015].
- ⁶⁴ William Piers to Sir John Lambe, 2 January 1634/5, reproduced in Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, 98.
- ⁶⁵ Barnes, *Somerset*, 16-17.
- ⁶⁶ Underdown, *Somerset*, 23; Underdown, *Reply to John Morrill*, 475.
- ⁶⁷ Hembry, *Bishops*, 230-1; Stieg, *Laud's Laboratory*, 282, 207, 301.
- ⁶⁸ Fincham, *Restoration of the Altars*, 919; Cressy, *Willingness to Wink*, 146; Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm*, 29; Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 204.
- ⁶⁹ Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, 336.
- ⁷⁰ Davies, *Caroline Captivity*, 226.
- ⁷¹ Keene, *Huish*.
- ⁷² Reeks, *Parish Religion in Somerset*, 130-131.
- ⁷³ Taunton, SHC, DBCC, *Corslie Contra Wheeler*, 21 April 1635, D/d/cd/71, unfol.
- ⁷⁴ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, 98.
- ⁷⁵ William Laud, *The History of the Troubles and Tryal of... William Laud, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury*. London, 1695. 261.
- ⁷⁶ Green, *Excommunications and Public Penances*, 114-5; 'Charles I - volume 375: Undated 1637', in *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1637-8*, ed. John Bruce (London, 1869), n. 84 <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/domestic/chas1/1637-8/pp49-69> [accessed 30 December 2015].
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- ⁷⁹ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, 99.
- ⁸⁰ Peake, *Somerset Clergy*, 203; Peter Heylyn, *Cyprianus Anglicus, or, The history of the life and death of the Most Reverend and renowned prelate William, by divine providence Lord Archbishop of Canterbury...* London, 1668. 289.
- ⁸¹ Heylyn, *Cyprianus Anglicus*, 289.
- ⁸² Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, 97-8.
- ⁸³ Sharpe, *Personal Rule*, 336.
- ⁸⁴ Prynne, *Canterburies Doome*, 97-8.
- ⁸⁵ London, Lambeth Palace Library Archives, MS943, *Papers of William Laud and others*, 481.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 499-502.
- ⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 501.

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